

Pied-billed grebe

Podilymbus podiceps

Status

Federal status: G5 N5, Not listed

NH state status: S1B/SZN, Endangered

ME state status: S4B, Not listed

Northeast Technical Committee species of concern due to risk of declining populations and lack of data with suspected declines. Considered a Migratory Bird of Management Concern in the Northeast.

Wetland habitat range-wide and regionally has declined substantially in the past, but what viability outcome that indicates is uncertain. Expert panelists agreed that the species is still viable, so leaned toward a C outcome regionally. WMNF has only one known location and probably has never had many, so could have a better outcome than regional but there is not enough information to conclude for sure. Single population on WMNF in Maine, based on extensive surveys, makes long-term persistence a concern.

Distribution

The pied-billed grebe has the widest distribution in the Americas of any grebe: Southeastern Alaska through southern Canada to Nova Scotia, south locally through North America, Middle America, West Indies, and South America to central Chile and Southern Argentina. Breeding populations in the northeastern U.S. are more localized and less abundant than in other regions of the U.S. and Canada. During the non-breeding season, it is found in southern British Columbia, western and southern U.S., and throughout South America.

During the mid-1900s this grebe was widely distributed throughout New Hampshire during the breeding season, occurring as far north as Pittsburg, and nesting in Errol. Numbers began to decrease around 1960. Other than a small cluster of confirmations in Strafford and northern Rockingham counties, records are widely scattered throughout the state. There are no known occurrences on the WMNF in New Hampshire.

The distribution of this species in Maine is less well-documented. In 1989, it was found in 9 of 30 intensively surveyed wetlands. It has been documented in Deer Hill Bog on the WMNF during the breeding season. However it is unknown if pied-billed grebes successfully breed at this site.

Habitat

Pied-billed grebes breed in waterbodies with both open water and emergent vegetation. This species uses dense emergent or aquatic vegetation close to the surface for nest building and anchoring, but needs nearby open water for foraging. It may nest in moderate to heavily populated places if nesting habitat is available, and will use beaver ponds and artificial impoundments if they are suitable. Grebes prefer moderately deep (0.25-2m) stable wetlands. Minimum wetland area is an important consideration, though the preferred area varies regionally. In the Midwest and Northeast, they appear to prefer

areas that are 5 hectares (12 acres) in size or larger. Pied-billed grebes are not limited by elevation.

Limiting Factors

Greatest threat in the Northeast is alteration and loss of wetlands through draining, dredging, filling, pollution, acid rain, agricultural practices and siltation. Wetland managers need to periodically reverse vegetative succession and open up extensive stands of emergent vegetation while maintaining suitable habitats nearby to serve as alternate nesting areas during wetlands manipulations. Pollution and environmental contaminants may degrade wetlands ecosystems and impair reproductive capacity in industrial areas.

Human disturbance can greatly disrupt nest attendance and incubation, boat wakes can flood nests, and floating nests can be washed over or capsized by wave action from motorized boats.

Viability concern

WMNF only has one known location, despite extensive habitat surveys, which makes long-term persistence on the Forest a concern. No other animal species on the list uses similar habitat to act as a surrogate.

Management activities that might affect viability

Activities such as dam construction, dam removal, and road building or decommissioning could alter suitable wetland habitat by changing hydrology or increasing pollution. Similarly, dam construction could increase suitable habitat if it would create a wetland of sufficient size with emergent vegetation and open waters. Management to encourage beaver activity, if successful, also could result in creation of suitable habitat.

Management decisions that would increase recreational use of Deer Hill Bog or other wetlands where this species occurs could reduce breeding success.

References

Gibbs, J.R. & Melvin, S.M. 1992. *Migratory Nongame Birds of Management Concern in the Northeast*. US Department of Interior Fish & Wildlife Service. Pp 31-49.

Kibbe, D.P. 1985. *Pied-billed Grebe Podilymbus podiceps*. *The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Vermont*. University Press of New England, Hanover, NH.

Muller, M.J.; Storer, R.W. 1999. *Pied-billed Grebe Podilymbus podiceps*. *The Birds of North America*. No. 410. Pp 1-32.

SVE panel. 2002. GMNF/WMNF Species Viability Evaluation Expert Panel notes on Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*). Panel held May 21-23, 2002, Manchester, NH.

Vernon, R.C. 1994. *Pied-billed Grebe Podilymbus podiceps*. *Atlas of Breeding Birds in New Hampshire*. Pp 4-5.

www.natureserve.org comprehensive report on Pied-billed Grebe as of 4/26/01.